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Your consumer education connection

Food Safety Educator

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September! The Kids--and BAC!--Are Back

Kids are going back to school, it's National Food Safety Education Month™, the Fight BAC!™ campaign is heading to schools--and it's all happening in September.

The National Food Safety Education Month™ theme is "Keep it Clean--The First Step to Food Safety." The "Clean" message is one of the four key messages in the Fight BAC!™ campaign.

National Food Safety Education Month™ was started four years ago by the International Food Safety Council, an arm of the National Restaurant Association's Educational Foundation.

Educational packets supporting the "Clean" message are being distributed to restaurants and food service operators through the Educational Foundation.

In addition, this year, as part of the President's Food Safety Initiative, federal agencies are working to bring National Food Safety Education Month™ to the nation's school children along with the Fight BAC!™ campaign.

A new food safety poster has been developed and is being sent to school food service managers in more than 50,000 elementary schools. The poster features a cartoon of the Fight BAC!™ character and teaches kids about the "Clean" message and handwashing.

The reverse side of the four-color poster pictures the Fight BAC!™ campaign's four key messages:

- CLEAN. Wash hands and surfaces often.
- SEPARATE. Don't cross-contaminate.

- COOK. Cook to proper temperatures.
- CHILL. Refrigerate promptly.

After National Food Safety Education Month™, schools can simply flip the poster over and the food safety messages can keep on working.

The poster was developed cooperatively by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the American School Food Service Association.

USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service is also pitching in and will be distributing an additional 19,000 copies of the poster to its cooperators.

"We knew it was time to get BAC into the schools and this is our first step," according to Susan Conley, director of the FSIS food safety education and communications staff.

But the poster is only one part of what's happening in September.

FDA and FSIS have assembled a 24-page Planning Guide for Food Safety Educators. The guide will be mailed to 12,000 educators nationwide including extension agents as well as county health departments.

The Planning Guide includes suggestions for National Food Safety Education Month™ activities as well as a variety of reproducible resources including a food safety quiz, word games and coloring pages.

To access the Planning Guide or check on other National Food Safety Education Month™ activities, go to:

www.foodsafety.gov/September ●

inside:

Food safety education and kids: it's a hot topic. In this issue you'll find two more articles on the subject:

- The findings of a new report on developing food safety education programs for schools
- New educational standards that include food safety.

Plus, check out this newsletter's insert. It's an 11-page listing of food safety education materials for schools.

Reaching Kids!

Children are identified by the President's Food Safety Initiative as a high-priority group to receive food safety education.

The question is: What's the best way to reach kids?

To answer that question, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) contracted with Macro International to produce a report that would guide planning of future K-12 food safety education initiatives. The title: ***USDA/FDA Education Initiative: Evaluating the Placement of Food Safety Education in Schools.***

Most experts interviewed agreed that food safety is an important topic for students to study, but that it is "not a priority issue" at present. Nearly everyone agreed that middle school grades were the most appropriate place for food safety messages.

Interviewees said that activities need to be hands-on in order to engage students. They also agreed that students were interested in their own health and, from that point of view, food safety was likely to be well received. Other observations include:

- **Family/consumer science classes provide an ideal setting** for food safety education. The down side--not all students are required to take these classes.
- **To reach the most students, science seems to offer the most promise.** The report notes that food safety messages would be more likely to be adopted by science teachers if they were modified to emphasize the "science" behind the message.

The report's summary is available through the Internet:
www.foodsafety.gov/~dms/fseduini.html

New Education Standards Include Food Safety

Safe food handling is a key component of new national standards for schools offering family and consumer science programs.

The new standards include a component called "Nutrition, Food Safety and Wellness." The standards were released by the National Association of State Administrators for Family and Consumer Sciences (an affiliate of the American Vocational Association).

With these standards, the structure will be in place to teach safe food handling in appropriate family and consumer science classes, according to Laura Fox of the FSIS food safety education and communications staff.

While the standards are not mandatory, states will be able to adopt them completely or in part.

"But regardless of what states choose to do, the food safety standards will be there on the table, a topic to be discussed. The standards are the model that curriculum developers and textbook writers will go to in order to begin the process," according to Marjorie Davidson, FDA food safety education officer.

Over the past several years, numerous studies have stressed the importance of reaching children with food safety education.

There are a number of reasons why this is of growing importance. More children are handling and preparing food on their own. Children are more susceptible to foodborne disease because their immune systems are not fully developed. Finally, the experts agree,

children are at the "teachable moment" for safe food handling.

According to Fox, the food safety standards mirror the farm-to-table focus of the President's Food Safety Initiative. "We wanted children to be able to see where food comes from, how it's produced and how food safety is important at each step along the way to their dinner table," Fox said.

The food safety component of the new national standards allows students to:

- **Evaluate the factors affecting food safety** from production through marketing,
- **Analyze foodborne illness** as a health issue for individuals and families, and
- **Demonstrate safe food handling.**

involvement with the model curriculum came about as a result of research into the placement of food safety education in schools.

"Through our research efforts we learned that the national standards for family and consumer sciences were in the process of being drafted. As a result of our contact, we were able to help broaden the scope of the standards to include food safety," Fox said.

For a copy of the model standards, contact:

Judith Hetherly
3732 Steck Avenue
Austin, TX 78758
Email: jhetherly@facse.org
Website: www.facse.org

New FDA Survey Reveals Consumer Concerns

Consumer concern about “germs” in food has increased by 60 percent over the past 5 years, according to Alan Levy of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Speaking at a USDA/FDA teleconference in May 1998, Levy called this increase one of the survey’s “most surprising findings.”

FDA’s last consumer survey was conducted in 1993. That was prior to the *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreak in the Northwest states that claimed the lives of four children. At that time, 38 percent of consumers considered germs a serious problem in food. Today, that figure stands at 55 percent.

Levy noted that the percent of consumers concerned about antibiotic resistance has also increased dramatically, doubling from 8 percent in 1993 to 16 percent today.

The new FDA survey was conducted between February and April of this year. It represents a random sample of U.S. adults and was conducted by telephone with 2,001 people. As Levy noted, the new survey allows us to see how consumer attitudes, concerns and behaviors have changed over the past 5 years.

The survey shows that consumers are very aware of some kinds of foodborne pathogens. Ninety percent of the people surveyed are familiar with *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Salmonella*. But Levy pointed out that only 20 percent are aware of *Campylobacter* and *Listeria*. This is significant because new data from FoodNet shows *Campylobacter* is the leading cause of foodborne disease. *Listeria*, while not a common cause of illness, can cause serious complications and death for high-risk individuals including pregnant women and infants, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems.

The survey also sheds light on consumers’ food handling practices. The last survey showed a significant percentage of people ate undercooked foods. Dr. Levy reports that the current survey shows that “many people still eat raw eggs and undercooked burgers, but the percentages are declining. This shows that increasing knowledge is driving significant change in behavior,” Levy said.

The survey also shows that consumers:

- Are still not washing cutting boards
- Don’t wash hands frequently enough during food preparation
- Leave food out at room temperature too long.

According to Levy, “These are all areas where we need to do a lot more education.”

Do consumers recognize the role they have to play? According to Levy, they recognize a little bit, but for the most part, they feel that food safety problems are in other people’s hands—manufacturers, restaurants. “We as educators face an obstacle in convincing people that there is a problem they can do something about. This remains a significant problem for effective consumer education,” he said.

Information from the survey should be released later this summer. Check the www.foodsafety.gov website for updates. ●

Tracking Disease

FoodNet, the sentinel site surveillance system operating at seven sites, now covers some 20.3 million people in the U.S. That number is expected to grow as an eighth site is added this year.

FoodNet is a collaborative project of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

CDC’s FoodNet Coordinator, Drew Voetsch, reported on the surveillance system at the USDA/FDA teleconference in May.

FoodNet was set up to get better estimates of the number of cases of foodborne disease in the U.S., to determine the cause and respond to new and emerging foodborne diseases.

FoodNet has been operational for 2 years and is quickly increasing its knowledge base regarding foodborne disease. Among the general findings, surveillance data show:

- A strong seasonality to foodborne illness. Most cases of illness peak during the summer months.
- *Campylobacter* is “far and away the number one pathogen causing illness in each and every month,” Voetsch said.
- There are strong variations in the rates of foodborne diseases from site to site in different states.

Sites are currently operating in California, Connecticut, Georgia, New York, Maryland, Minnesota, and Oregon. For more information, check the CDC website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/foodnet/foodnet.htm> ●

Vice President Gore Launches New System for Tracking Illness

This past May, Vice President Gore announced a new national computer network that will be five times faster at identifying foodborne illness.

The network, called PulseNet, will coordinate DNA fingerprinting of pathogens throughout 27 states. This will allow public health officials to quickly identify multi-state outbreaks and track sources of food contamination.

For instance, in as little as 48 hours, PulseNet can identify *E. coli* O157:H7 strains isolated from foods and patients from the DNA patterns. By contrast, in 1993, it took 3 weeks to track an *E. coli* O157:H7 outbreak to contaminated hamburger.

The network is coordinated through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It is expected that all states will be participating by 1999.

For more information, go to: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/pulsenet/pulsenet.htm ●

Welcoming New Subscribers

We now have more than 9,000 subscribers to *The Food Safety Educator*. Just last month more than 250 people signed up.

Just as we had hoped when we started *The Educator*, you and your colleagues across the country represent a wide range of interests.

Among the people signing up last month were educators at major universities and colleges, local and state public health offices, high schools, area offices on aging, major food producers, hospitals and even educators from Sweden, Uruguay, Argentina, the U.K. and Canada. Welcome to all of you. ●

Salmonella Enteritidis: Risk Assessment

A new report released by the Food Safety and Inspection Service indicates that reducing human illness from *Salmonella* Enteritidis (SE) may require a variety of interventions as opposed to a single "magic bullet" approach.

The report is based on a new risk assessment computer model program developed by a multi-disciplinary team with members from government and academia.

"This is our first quantitative farm-to-table microbial risk assessment and we expect it to serve as a prototype for future risk assessments," according to USDA Under Secretary for Food Safety Catherine Woteki.

"With this computer model, we now have a program with which we can identify the interventions that provide the best returns in terms of public health protection," she said.

"From this exercise, we've learned a very important principle. That is, a broadly based policy is more likely to be effective than a policy directed solely at one area of the egg production to consumption chain," Woteki added.

The risk assessment had several objectives, including assessing the health risks from eating shell eggs and egg products contaminated with SE, identifying data needs and identifying and evaluating risk reduction strategies.

Using the available data, the risk assessment model estimates that 2.3 million of the 46.8 billion shell eggs produced in the U.S. every year are infected with SE. Consumption of these eggs causes an estimated 661,633 illnesses.

The report, titled *Salmonella Enteritidis Risk Assessment*, can be accessed on the web:

<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OPHS/ophspubs.htm> ●

More Info on FDA Consumer Magazine

As mentioned in the last issue of *The Educator*, the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) magazine *FDA Consumer* carries articles periodically about food safety issues.

In fact, the September issue will include a special section about food safety for National Food Safety Education Month™. Topics will include juice and egg safety.

The magazine also offers a wealth of new and in-depth information about health. In addition, it reports on FDA activities to ensure that the products it regulates are safe to use. This covers a wide spectrum--food, human and animal drugs, medical devices, radiation-emitting products, biologics.

Concerning subscription information--there is a \$9 annual fee and the magazine comes out bimonthly. Subscriptions are handled through the Government Printing Office. Call 202/512-1800. Or check the website:

<http://www.fda.gov/opacom/morechoices/FDAconsumer.html> ●

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